

THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY

BULLETIN

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DAM IT! SAY CIVIL ENGINEERS

In a report widely and, we believe, wrongly perceived as “anti-development”, the World Commission on Dams (WCD) has concluded that although large dams have often created important benefits, “in too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms...” And the nub of their report is that proposals for large dam projects require much more careful evaluation, involving *all* key stakeholders, before being approved.

These findings roused considerable debate when they were presented to a meeting in Harare in January, at which your Society was represented. An audience composed largely of civil engineering consultants was particularly worried that the kind of consultations suggested by the WCD would impose unacceptable delays on the process of dam planning and construction.

Some speakers were particularly dismissive of the ecological viewpoint, and one went so far as to talk of “a few frogs getting in the way (of development).” This signal should be taken seriously by the Society, as it shows that what our BFA partners call “ecological illiteracy” - profound ignorance of the values of functioning ecosystems to human survival - is alive, well, and indeed flourishing.

Large dams are of course of great relevance to the Society, and our own Zambezi Basin Initiative is designed to counter precisely this kind of attitude, by disseminating objective information about the values of biological diversity and healthy ecosystems, but the immediate issue is how the work of the WCD can be taken forward.

Having done its work, the WCD has wound itself up. The Society signed on to a resolution, which was passed by IUCN’s recent Amman congress, urging the continuation of the WCD’s work in some manner, but it is not yet clear how this will happen. Meanwhile, many, if not most, of the WCD’s findings apply equally to other large infrastructural developments, such as mining, airports, roads and large-scale agricultural development. Your Society is in touch with the WCD’s Cape Town office and is exploring ways in which it can help implement WCD findings.

ZAMBEZI BASIN INITIATIVE

ZBI partners Fauna and Flora International have sourced £20 000 for the Society to continue work on the development and implementation of the ZBI project. We have therefore engaged Rob Cunliffe, who has worked with us for many years, and who played an important role in the development of the ZBI, to work on the project throughout 2001.

Meanwhile, several important conservation issues have already begun to emerge from ZBI-related work already carried out by the Society and the BFA. These include the status and conservation of Zambezi Valley “dry forests”; the absence of good taxonomy for - and the likely decline of hitherto-unknown subspecies of - the Reduncine antelopes, which include lechwes, sitatunga, reedbuck &c; and the need for conservation action in several Zambezi wetlands including the Mwinilunga area around the source of the river and the Zambezi Delta itself.

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WILDERNESS...

The Society's research and report on wilderness values, produced by Sally Wynn, has thus far been a huge success. After receiving favourable comments from government agencies and tourism industry representatives, ZCT Chief Executive Elias Nyakunu offered to chair a seminar designed to explore ways of converting the project findings into tourism policy and industry guidelines. This seminar was held on March 1 at the Bronte Hotel, was opened by the Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism, and was attended by 40 senior representatives from government departments and the private sector.

After a presentation of the report's major findings and recommendations, the seminar discussed ways of incorporating them into tourism policy and planning. The process will now be continued through small working groups drawn from the seminar delegates.

The Society should be greatly encouraged by the way in which its research and recommendations were endorsed by the seminar, and by the keenness to pursue the issue that was shown by delegates. There was a general acknowledgment that tourism is already destroying one of its vital assets - the wilderness quality of the Zambezi Valley - and that future planning should attempt, not only to reverse this trend, but to mitigate the problems already in existence.

Our thanks go to the Bronte Hotel, who provided a venue free of charge; to Rooney's (Pvt) Ltd, who provided a digital projector at no cost; and to Landela Safaris and Wilderness Safaris, who contributed financially to the seminar.

...AND TOURISM

As a result of a chance conversation with a representative of the USAID-financed Campfire Development Fund (CDF), we were asked to help Guruve and Muzarabani RDCs to develop proposals for collaborative ecotourism development across their two districts. An initial concept paper, written by the Society and the two RDCs, was accepted by the CDF and full proposals are now being developed.

These proposals include the creation of new low-cost ecotourism facilities in wilderness areas in Guruve district; a major upgrading of Muzarabani RDC's Mavuradonha campsite; the strengthening of wildlife and habitat management; the creation of a well signposted ecotourism route through both districts; feasibility studies for a proper ferry at Kanyemba; and the creation of a joint District ecotourism board with the capability of being extended to include neighbouring parts of Mozambique.

If the proposals are successful, the development of ecotourism in these districts, specifically aimed at local and regional markets, will make an important contribution to human wellbeing and to habitat and wildlife conservation in the area.

BLACK RHINOS

There have been some developments linked to the Society's support for the Matusadona IPZ since our last Bulletin. We are currently working with Rob Brett, the Italian-funded co-ordinator of the SADC rhino management programme, to develop proposals for the funding of earnotching, censusing and monitoring of the Matusadona black rhino population.

Meanwhile Adrian Wilson, now director of Zambezi Society (UK), is raising further funds to support much of this work, and also to continue our support for the Tashinga calf-rearing and release project.

Chisipite Junior School Grade Six pupils need special mention once again for raising Z\$72 000 for this project last year. This is truly amazing, given current circumstances. This school has supported our black rhino work for seven years now, not only ensuring that essential costs for rhino feed are always covered, but also providing a valuable educational experience for nearly a generation of eleven-year old schoolgirls.

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DRY LAYERED FORESTS...

...aka jesse bush, is unique to the Zambezi Valley, and therefore of global biodiversity importance. Dr Richard Hoare, who supervises the Society's elephant research work, took a team of botanists and ornithologists into dry forest areas in Guruve district early this month to identify a range of sites for research into the links between biodiversity and disturbance by elephants and humans. The hypothesis is that biodiversity may in fact be increased by an as yet unknown level of disturbance. If this proves to be the case, it will have considerable implications for conservation strategies, land planning and habitat management.

More intensive and extensive research work will be carried out in the identified sites during April and May this year, and the findings will be incorporated into the discussions of a transboundary elephant management workshop, with representatives from Guruve and Muzarabani districts and Tete province, Mozambique, to be held by the Society in July this year.

MUZARABANI ANTI-POACHING UNITS

The Society donated eight sleeping bags, two pairs of binoculars and two compasses to Muzarabani RDC's field wildlife management unit in early February. Currently led by Acting Wildlife Officer Alfred Mafunga, the unit is responsible for patrolling the Mavuradonha Wilderness Area and other important habitats within the RDC area.

The unit's salaries and other costs are paid by the RDC from its ecotourism and hunting revenues, but declines in revenues during 2000 have led to shortages of funds for capital items. The Society therefore offered this donation in line with its new policy of supporting communal land natural resource management units.

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